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# **The influence of trauma on musicians**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**Doctor Musicae (Performing Arts)**

in the

Department of Music

School for the Arts

Faculty of Humanities

University of Pretoria

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**Pretoria – November 2009**

## Abstract

The aim of this study was to shed light on the influence of trauma on aspects of musicians' music-making, particularly but not exclusively limited to its effects on emotional expression and memory during music performance and study. Effects on performers and teachers were considered, explicated and discussed in the light of the rapidly expanding body of knowledge about factors involved in psychological sequelae following exposure to traumatic event(s).

Examples are given of how trauma has affected famous musicians and composers. Questionnaires sent to healthcare professionals and music teachers and four case study investigations illuminated specific signs of trauma. Findings underlined that, while responses to trauma are always of a very individual nature, these often particularly affected emotional expression and altered the perceived experience of emotions. Dissociative symptoms were found to affect memory and concentration. Trauma sequelae caused interference, drained energy levels, affected motivation, interpersonal relationships and self-esteem but also led to growth and trauma-catalyzed transformation. Anxiety and tension-related problems had pronounced effects on music performance and high levels of 'stage fright' were reported by previously traumatized participants. Trauma was shown to influence the career paths and decisions of musicians.

As gleaned from the literature and research surveys, the following therapeutic approaches appear to be effective: Psychotherapy, trauma counselling, Cognitive-Behavioural therapy, hypnotherapy, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), EMI (Eye Movement Integration), pharmacological treatment, natural supplements, body therapies such as SE (Somatic Experiencing) and complementary techniques such as acupuncture. Sound and music were identified by respondents and participants as playing an extremely beneficial role in the healing process. The possible benefits of incorporating alternative healing modalities are discussed, but it is made clear that this should only be used in conjunction with scientifically proven and thoroughly researched psychotherapeutic intervention strategies.

This study's results, appropriately disseminated, are intended to increase awareness and knowledge in performers and teachers, and enable particularly teachers to refer students to appropriate healthcare services in ways not risking further traumatization. Findings can assist healthcare

professionals to better understand particular manifestations of trauma responses in musicians and enable them to intervene in more effective ways.

**List of Keywords:**

Dissociation, emotion, healing therapies, healthcare professionals, holistic paradigm, memory, musicians, music teachers, psychotherapy, trauma.



## DEDICATION

*To fellow musicians...*

Too very often do circumstances challenge us to the utmost, or even prevent us from reaching our full potential. In most cases this can be avoided.

It is my hope that this mini-thesis will contribute towards helping performers and teachers understand trauma better and inspire researchers to tirelessly search for solutions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the following people for assistance during the theoretical as well as practical components of this research:

The promoter for this study, Prof Caroline van Niekerk, for her expertise and invaluable assistance throughout the course of this study. Her intellectual support, editorial suggestions, efficiency and the timely manner in which feedback was given are highly regarded. It was a great privilege to work under her professional and knowledgeable guidance.

The co-promoter for this study, Dr Woltemade Hartman, for his immense knowledge of the subject of psychology and his particular interest in trauma and its effects. His enthusiasm to assist with this interdisciplinary project and his dedication to this study are greatly appreciated.

Isobel Rycroft and part-time staff of the music library at the University of Pretoria for assistance with assembling library materials. Their friendly support and the expedient way in which requests were handled are appreciated.

Dr Jolanta Welbel from the department of Music Psychology of the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw (Uniwersytet Muzyczny Fryderyka Chopina w Warszawie) for taking the time to discuss the subject of trauma and musicians and sharing her very valuable insights during time spent in Warsaw in September 2009.

This study would not have been possible without the contributions of those who have taken the time to respond to the questionnaires and have generously shared their knowledge and experience on the subject. The four individuals volunteering as case studies are also thanked for their time, insights, courage and willingness to participate in the hope that this study could make a difference in the lives of other musicians.

I would like to thank Proff Jan Kadlubiski and Joseph Stanford for guidance with the performance component of this study. I am indebted to them for graciously sharing their knowledge and for the enormous amount they taught me about music and culture. I also owe a debt to the late Prof Lionel

Bowman who was perhaps the first person to alert me to how traumatic experience could influence music performance.

Thanks are due to the following people for advice and for pointing me in the direction of additional source material and information (in alphabetical order): Drs Jan Bastiaan Fouché, Gerda Fourie, Annalie Swanepoel and Ronél Yu. In this regard, the input of Mary-Ann Jacobs and Voula Samouris is also recognised. Others whose support and encouragement are greatly appreciated include: Fang Heng, Hanna Kaminska, Bertha le Roux, Merryl Monard, Małgorzata and Jacek Ostrowski and Gerhard van Wyk.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Polish friends who bravely shared accounts of war-time experiences as well as experiences whilst Poland was under communist rule – their own as well as those of previous generations. This was but one motivating factor behind this research and, like countless other accounts of traumatic experiences, far surpasses thresholds of pain and endurance and is testimony of human courage and resilience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of figures	xiii

### CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 Motivation for the study	1
1.2 Theoretical framework	3
1.3 Hypotheses	4
1.4 Research questions	4
1.5 Aims of the study	5
1.6 Research method	5
1.7 Delimitation of the study	6
1.8 Value of the study	7
1.9 Discussion of contents	7
1.10 Literature overview	8
1.11 Notes to the reader	9

### CHAPTER 2: EMOTION AND MEMORY

2.1 Introduction to the relationship between emotion and memory	13
2.2 Defining emotion	14
2.3 Biological basis of emotions	16
2.4 Emotion and motivation	18
2.5 Expression and perception of emotion in music performance and appreciation	20
2.5.1 Expression of emotion in music performance	20
2.5.2 Perception of emotion in music appreciation	24
2.6 Defining memory	26
2.7 Types of memory	27
2.8 Emotion, memory and trauma	30
2.8.1 Processing of emotion during traumatic situations	30
2.8.2 Traumatic memories	33
2.8.3 Biological basis of traumatic memories	34

2.8.4 The effects of trauma on memory for music	36
2.8.5 The recovered memory debate	40
2.9 Performance from memory and stage fright	41

### **CHAPTER 3: TRAUMA**

3.1 Defining trauma	47
3.2 Types and dynamics of trauma	49
3.3 Acute Stress Disorder	51
3.4 Post-traumatic Stress Disorder	53
3.5 Vulnerability to PTSD	55
3.6 Effects of trauma	58
3.7 Dissociation	63
3.8 Treatment of trauma symptoms	67
3.8.1 Pharmacological intervention	68
3.8.2 Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	69
3.8.3 Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Eye Movement Integration (EMI)	71
3.8.4 Hypnosis	72
3.8.5 Body therapies and the role of movement	73
3.8.6 Logotherapy	75
3.9 Alternative viewpoints regarding treatment of trauma	76
3.9.1 Chinese medicine	76
3.9.2 Ayurveda	77
3.9.3 Homeopathy	78
3.9.4 Energy medicine or vibrational medicine	78
3.9.5 The EPFX/SCIO as vibrational medicine intervention device	80

### **CHAPTER 4: TRAUMA AND MUSIC**

4.1 Psychological aspects of music performance	82
4.1.1 Mental focus, integration and musical identity	82
4.1.2 Factors influencing level of performance	83
4.1.3 Concentration and memory breakdown	85
4.1.4 Uniqueness of each human brain	86
4.2 The effects of trauma on musicians	86



4.2.1	Attributing negative symptoms to trauma	87
4.2.2	Symptoms involving the emotions	87
4.2.3	Re-enactment, area of perceived threat and internal perception of time	88
4.2.4	Symptoms involving memory and concentration	89
4.3	The influence of past trauma on famous musicians	90
4.3.1	Physical and occupational disabilities, extra-ordinary lives and extra-ordinary tenacity	91
4.3.2	Mood disturbances, familial trauma and re-enactment	91
4.3.3	Positive outcomes and the prevention of traumas	92
4.4	The use of music and art in the recovery process after trauma	94
4.4.1	The healing role of art as representation and expression of human experience	94
4.4.2	Ways in which music and art can facilitate healing	96
4.4.3	Music therapy as a means of facilitating the communication process	98
4.4.4	Music as coping mechanism, its anxiolytic effects and potential as counter-vortex to the trauma-vortex	99
4.5	Responsibilities of music teachers regarding witnessing and referring	100

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

5.1	Introduction	104
5.2	Research design	107
5.3	Qualitative psychological research	109
5.4	Methodology	110
5.4.1	Background on emotion, memory and trauma	111
5.4.2	Questionnaires	111
5.4.3	Case studies	112
5.4.4	Discussion	114
5.5	Limitations	115
5.6	Ethical considerations	117

## **CHAPTER 6: OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH SURVEY**

6.1	Opinions of participant healthcare professionals	120
6.1.1	Population of respondents	120
6.1.2	Signs and symptoms of trauma affecting musicians	121

6.1.3 Treatment	123
6.1.4 Effects on professional functioning of musicians	126
6.1.5 Medication	127
6.1.6 Different types of trauma	130
6.1.7 The roles and responsibilities of music teachers	131
6.1.8 Trauma and psychiatric diagnosis	134
6.1.9 Additional comments	135
6.2 Opinions of participant music teachers	136
6.2.1 Population of respondents	136
6.2.2 Types of trauma and teachers' interpretations of its influence	137
6.2.3 Teachers' experiences in working with traumatized students	139
6.2.4 Effects on emotion	140
6.2.5 Effects on memory	141
6.2.6 Interference with optimal performance	144
6.2.7 Referring students to healthcare professionals	146
6.2.8 Additional comments	148
6.3 Self-reports of trauma experienced by teachers	149
6.4 Case studies	152
6.4.1 Participant A	153
6.4.2 Participant B	155
6.4.3 Participant C	158
6.4.4 Participant D	160

## **CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

7.1 Observations emerging from the research survey	165
7.1.1 The active nature of observation	165
7.1.2 Obtaining treatment in the aftermath of trauma and the matter of referral	166
7.1.3 Ways observed by respondents in which trauma affects musicians	167
7.1.4 Treatment	168
7.1.5 Possible bias in population of respondents	169
7.2 Aspects relevant to self-reports of teachers	170
7.2.1 Impact of teachers' own experiences of trauma on assessment of students	170
7.2.2 Ways observed by respondent teachers how trauma affected their memory	171

7.2.3 Overview of effects identified in self-reports	171
7.3 Observations emerging from the case study investigations	172
7.3.1 Influence particular to musicians: general overview of symptoms	172
7.3.2 Effects on emotion including emotional illness	172
7.3.3 Effects on memory	173
7.3.4 Effects of trauma on interpersonal relationships and on teaching	173
7.3.5 Dissociative symptoms	174
7.3.6 Treatment	175
7.3.7 Professional career path, spirituality and growth	176
7.4 General observations applicable to the research survey and case studies	176
7.4.1 Unconscious processing of music, witnessing and projection	176
7.4.2 Audible effects	178
7.4.3 The place of movement therapies and alternative or complementary medicine	179
7.4.4 Music's healing role	179
7.5 Comparison of research findings to literature on trauma	180
7.5.1 Effects of trauma and their extent	180
7.5.2 Effects of trauma experienced early in life	181
7.5.3 Concerns particular to survivors of sexual abuse and incest	182
7.5.4 The eyes as a means of non-verbal communication	183
7.5.5 Dissociation	183
7.5.6 Medication	184
7.5.7 Challenge of ascertaining accurate diagnoses	185
7.5.8 Functioning in the present moment	186
7.5.9 Importance of co-operation between the teaching and healthcare professions	186

## **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 Answering the research questions	188
8.2 Proving or disproving the hypotheses	190
8.3 Conclusions	192
8.3.1 Identification of signs of trauma and communication between musicians and professionals	192
8.3.2 Definition of trauma found to be applicable to musicians	193
8.3.3 Incorporating music, sound and movement in the healing process	193

8.3.4 From the universality to the uniqueness of traumatic experience: creating meaning	193
8.3.5 Awareness as prerequisite for appropriate referrals leading to effective treatment	194
8.4 Recommendations for further study	194
8.4.1 Collaboration between different disciplines	195
8.4.2 Effects of trauma on musicians at different levels of accomplishment	195
8.4.3 Personal experiences of trauma by healthcare professionals affecting their views	195
8.4.4 Gender differences	196
8.4.5 Effects of trauma on musicians' cognitive functioning, memory and concentration	196
8.4.6 Biological considerations	198
8.4.7 Rate of recovery	198
8.4.8 Aspects related to music's role in healing and the place of vibrational medicine	199
8.4.9 Providing good support structures for students in schools and lessening the risk of secondary traumatization to professionals	199
8.5 Recommendations regarding areas that should be implemented in the training of music educators	200
8.5.1 Implementing training in psychology in the music teaching curriculum	201
8.5.2 Benefits of incorporating movement as part of music training	202
8.5.3 Reaching teachers in rural areas	202
8.6 Epilogue	203
Appendix A: Questionnaire to Healthcare Professionals	204
Appendix B: Questionnaire to Music Teachers	207
Appendix C: Case Study Interviews	210
List of References	212

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Musicing: Four dimensions (Elliott 1995:40)	9
Figure 2: Different aspects of the chain of musical communication of emotion (Juslin 2005:87)	24
Figure 3: Defensive responses to fear that have been conserved through evolution (Kandel 2006:339)	42
Figure 4: Model for positive and negative manifestation of performance arousal (Gorrie 2009b:208)	44
Figure 5: The Dissociative Spectrum as assimilated by Hartman (2009) from the work of Peichl (2007a:162), Nijenhuis <i>et al.</i> (2004) and Watkins & Watkins (1997:32)	64
Figure 6: Five areas of Cognitive-Behavioural assessment ( <i>Royal College of Psychiatrists</i> 2007)	70